

From the Acting Chief Medical Officer
Dr Elizabeth Mitchell



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

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URGENT COMMUNICATION

HSS(MD)16/2009

AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÄNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin
an Fowk Siccar**

Out of Hours Centres - for urgent attention of all GPs and nurses working in OOH services
Chief Executives, HSC Board / Public Health Agency
Chief Executives, HSC Trusts
Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to Consultants in Communicable Disease Control, Regional Epidemiologists*)
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
Directors of Pharmaceutical Services, HSC Board / HSC Trusts / Business Support Organisation
Director of Primary Care, HSC Board
GP Medical Advisers, HSC Board
Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to, A& E doctors, ID Physicians, Microbiologists, Virologists*).
Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts
All General Practitioners (*for onward distribution to practice staff including practice nurses*)
All Community Pharmacists
Medical Director, RQIA
Dr J Mairs, Regional Procurement Pharmacist
Regional Medicines Information Service
CVO, DARD
CSO, AFBI
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Your Ref:

Our Ref: HSS(MD)16/2009

Date: 25 April 2009

Dear Colleague

SWINE FLU – MEXICO AND USA

Human cases of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection have been identified in California and Texas in the United States and in three districts in Mexico. The Swine Influenza A/H1N1 viruses characterized in this outbreak have not been previously detected in pigs or humans.

Key messages

- The reported events in the US and Mexico are unusual and warrant further investigation and vigilance on the part of other countries. The Department and Public Health Agency are monitoring the situation in the US and Mexico closely.
- There is currently a very low level of flu activity in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.
- No cases of human swine flu have been identified in the UK or anywhere in Europe.
- The public health risk to the population of Northern Ireland is very low.

- There has been no change to the WHO pandemic alert level which is currently at WHO Phase 3.
- Epidemiological and virological studies are ongoing in the US at the moment, supported by WHO and other international partners.

Clinical Features of Swine Flu

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing, sore throat, muscle aches and headache. Some people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Action required:

Clinicians should consider the possibility of swine influenza virus infections in patients presenting with febrile respiratory illness who:

- Have travelled to Mexico or in the San Diego and/or Imperial County, California or San Antonio, Texas, USA or
- Have been in contact with persons suffering from respiratory or flu-like illness from these areas in the 7 days prior to their illness onset.

If swine flu is suspected, clinicians should

- contact the Regional Virology Laboratory (through the Royal Group of Hospital switchboard on 028 9024 0503) to arrange urgent delivery of viral transport medium to the clinical location of the patient;
- obtain a nasopharyngeal swab from the patient, place the swab in the viral transport medium, refrigerate the specimen;
- arrange for the swab (placed in the transport medium) to be transported to the Regional Virus Laboratory (Royal Group of Hospitals) without delay to facilitate timely diagnostics;
- contact the on-call public health doctor for the Public Health Agency through NI Ambulance Control (028 9040 4045) for advice on further steps to take;
- advise patients on respiratory and infection control precautions as for seasonal flu (See below).;
- advise anyone who has recently traveled to the affected areas and is experiencing influenza like illness should stay at home to limit contact with others, and seek medical advice from a local health professional;

consider antiviral treatment - testing has shown that the human swine influenza H1N1 can be treated with the antiviral oseltamavir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®). Treatment should preferably commence within 48 hours of onset of symptoms. For guidance on the use of antiviral drugs for the treatment of influenza: see CMO letter (HSS(MD)40/2008) on DHSSPS website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk or Technology Appraisal Guidance No. 58. <http://www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/TA58>

The Department is not recommending any additional precautions for travellers to California, Texas or Mexico.

